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## SOME COMMENTS ON THE OPEN SOCIETY POLITOLOGICAL ISSUE (FROM POPPER TO SOROS AND BACK)<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Dobiaš - Soňa Dobiašová\*

### ABSTRACT

The concept of open society is among possible projective alternatives that is related to the search for an acceptable arrangement of social and political structures of society, while largely reflecting the fundamental uncertainty of reality. The primary goal of this paper is in an endeavour to place the key political, philosophical and partly historical parameters of the concept of open society in the arena of contemporary political theory and practice, the analysis of strengths and risks of an open society concept in terms of its potential content, taking into account the cross/section of individual differentiated interests with circumstances, systemic pressures or ideological prejudices and making precise recommendations for a full-fledged implementation of an empirically verifiable form of coexistence, superior to any potential and/or existing totalitarian alternatives. Especially, we have outlined general framework of the concept of open society and the transformation of theoretical parameters of an open society into a political intention (system) in K. R. Popper and G. Soros theory of open society and the philosophy of critical rationalism.

**Key words:** open society, critical rationalism, fallibilism, humanism, democracy, totalitarianism

### Introduction

Legitimate pursuit of a rational penetration into the dynamics of a given, but

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not invariant, environment, and inquiring about the basic assumptions of its own and contradictory paradox of significant nature, appears to be included among the obviously unique aspects of human existence. Therefore, a constant revision of the ideological foundations of the anthropologically determined presence and future written by the past is a unifying feature in the evolution of the basic attributes of man's thinking and action. We are looking for an authentic meaning of something that often arises from random, practical needs of human history, which is marked by uncertainty and a large number of potential content implications, but we still keep trying to distinguish them in a living sequence of cognitive activities and ultimately identify a certain core of intelligible meaning therein contained.

The belief that the world is lawful and rational, that in the reflection of reason this lawful rationality is made available to thinking, is the core of civilisation cultivation in the intellectual tradition of Europe, so it is within the capacity of reason to understand it and control future perspectives of social reproduction. At the same time, this fact defines the limits for the systematic conceptualization of an ideological agenda that respects dignity and freedom as the essence of humanity for uplifting humanity and creating a better world.

The struggle for the creation of a free and fairer world by applying the idea of reason immanently includes the notions of open, openness, which refer to the idea of a system capable of adapting its structure to internal stimuli, but also to signals from the environment. The extent and intensity of adaptation could be seen as a measure of its openness, whose anthropological equivalent represents the ability to live and perceive with other people at the level of coexistence of cultures, intellectual trends, or confessional models. Inevitably, it presumes the effort to systematize the different, the multifaceted, while the difference and pluralism in terms of civilisation is seen as the basis for a continuous dynamic advancement in the search for a better world. How, however, can something be grasped in an organized and systematized form, which in itself accentuates incomprehensibility and indefinability? What is the form of an organized structure that offers the implementation of immanent diversity and differentiatedness?

The answer to this question is far from being straightforward, we could even say that it is open. The concept of open society is one of the possible projective alternatives, which is related to the search for an acceptable arrangement of social and political structures of society, while at the same time largely reflecting the fundamental indeterminateness of reality. When designing its basic

parameters, we proceed from a model situation, creating a space for constituting the environment as a way of coexisting and coordinating rational, morally responsible beings based on the values of individual freedom, equality, and justice. The primary goal of this paper is to strive for setting the key political, philosophical and partly historical parameters of the concept of open society in the arena of contemporary political theory and practice, analysis of the strengths and risks of an open society concept in terms of its potential content, taking into account the penetration of individual differentiated interests with circumstances, systemic pressures or ideological prejudices and precise recommendations for a full-fledged implementation of an empirically verifiable form of coexistence, superior to all potential and real totalitarian alternatives. We have outlined general framework of the concept of open society and the transformation of theoretical parameters of an open society into a political intention by works of K. R. Popper and G. Soros *“The Open Society and Its Enemies”*, *“All Life is Problem Solving”*, *“Open Society. Reforming Global Capitalism”* and *“The Age of Fallibility. Consequences of the War on the Terror”*.

## **1 Open-society Theory and Practice in the Current Arena of Ideological Confrontations**

The term of open society was introduced into political theory in 1932 by the French philosopher **Henri Bergson**, trying to identify the two key sources - tribal and universal, from which two types of societies are formed - closed and open, based on exploring the origins of morality and religion. Against the background of distinguishing the transition from closed to open society, he tried to show that this process corresponds to the basic characteristics of the transition from static to dynamic morality, from static to dynamic religion. He concluded that human nature is pre-modelled for a certain social form, a social predisposition is preserved by the inherited transmission of acquired characteristics, i.e. individual and collective ideas, enshrined in institutions of religion, language or morality, show some kind of activity, directly conditioned by social need. Every human being is naturally covered by layer of habits, neutralizing the decomposing activity of reason, which the social environment (through morality, religion) keeps and reinserts into everyone.

One of the most prominent figures in the theory of open society and the philosophy of critical rationalism was **Sir K. R. Popper**. Through his life and intellectual output, he participated in the formation and practical implementation

of a scientific and professional atmosphere based on his identifying with the position of critical rationalism as a fundamental life attitude, respecting the acceptance of humanism as belief in man, reason, freedom, fraternity, and egalitarian justice. In this context, we may also understand the notion of open society, which does not represent a defined exactness, but rather a vaguely anticipated goal, a regulatory idea. Thus, an open society is not (should not be) a political system in the traditional sense, but it is a way of coexistence among individuals. The **Popperesque** unifying principle, from which the rules for such a form of organisation are created, is in the application of permanent critical justification in any sphere of human activity, leading to the creation of democratically guaranteed conditions of autonomous creativity. We perceive this dimension of **Popper's** theory from the position of the platform of biological and spiritual openness of the world, the essence of which he expressed as follows: *"The future is wide open. It depends on us, all of us. And it depends on what we are doing ... and what we will be doing ... And what we are doing and will be doing depends on our thinking again; and on our wishes, our hopes, our fears. It depends on how we look at the world; and how we consider wide-open future possibilities ..."* (Popper: 1997, p. 201).

**G. Soros**, one of **Popper's** disciples, man who - in his own words - *"was merely blessed by happiness and managed to make his dreams come true as hardly anyone else ... whose influence, however, is greatly exaggerated"*, lays his understanding of the concept of open society on similar foundations (Soros: 2007, p. 11). In fact, this state of affairs was ultimately reflected in his view that while striving to make the world better, he, unlike other people, could have a much greater impact on the course of political events: *"My goal is to make the world a better place. Many people have the same ambition and work more on things than I do. I differ from them by being able to act on a larger scale than most of other people ... How did I achieve this privileged position? ... To sum up, I believe there are three assumptions within me working together. Firstly, I have developed a conceptual framework that has given me a certain understanding of history, and in particular of what I call strongly imbalanced situations; secondly, I have a set of strong ethical and political beliefs; and thirdly, I have made heaps of money"*. (Soros: 2007, p. 12). Since the combination of all these three attributes is unusual for most people, **Soros** ultimately considers his own ability to do the right thing an exceptional privilege and use it his greatest reward ..

So far, we have outlined the general framework of the concept of open society, based with both of the above authors on the knowledge that our understanding of the world is inherently imperfect. This methodological assumption is based on the tradition of understanding the reason as a basic identifying factor serving a unified picture of reality, but at the same time admitting the possibility that *"I may be wrong, you may be right, but we may arrive at truth by joint efforts"*. Rationalism is thus synonymous with criticism, it is directly conditional to and requires criticality, correcting and undermining the resistance of any opinion in terms of its exclusivity or objectivity.

As science is a highly human phenomenon, fallibilism is the essential feature of our knowledge. Accordingly, our knowledge, and more precisely our belief that we are touching reality in knowledge, is always just improvisation, has a highly probabilistic character, we cannot achieve a state of undoubted knowledge in science or in everyday life, we are never able to know anything completely, without doubt. According to **Popper**, this is an opinion that represents a continuous expression of what we may register even in the ancient tradition, where leadership was understood as a presumption, an opinion rather than an unquestionable truth, and the tradition of a sceptical school as a line of thought based on exploration, searching, consideration was born. Therefore, our knowledge is hypothetical, laws or theories of science are always acceptable only temporarily, and the idea of error includes in the theory of knowledge the idea of truth as a standard that we will never achieve. The true opposite of this tradition is represented by the authoritative intellectualism in **Popper's** conception, based on the belief in the possibility of knowing the perfect truth and gaining unquestionable knowledge.

The rational relationship of man to reality, marked by imperfect understanding, is considered by **G. Soros** as the theoretical foundation of his conception of open society: *"All conscious human beings, their thoughts and actions, are part of reality. This fact, that our thinking is part of what we are thinking about ..., puts our understanding of the reality a certain insurmountable obstacle, and at the same time makes the reality different from how we understand it"* (Soros: 2007, p. 27). This view is not methodologically compatible with the generally accepted notion of reality, which as if it were waiting somewhere outside of us to be understood by creating an image that coincides with it. The tradition of approaching the reality as something independently given has its roots in the Enlightenment, when the ruling view of the world did not place any limits on the cognitive function, and the scientific method only

respected the one-way connection between thinking and reality. However, according to **Soros**, this is one of many distortions deeply rooted in the way we look at our relationship to reality. Our view of the world will never coincide with the world as it is, because we are a part of it, and what we think becomes automatically part of what we have to think about.

Therefore, the relationship between the nature of reality and the ways of knowing it should be seen as reflective. The reflective situation is characterized by the lack of consensus among the participants and the actual state of affairs, reflexivity introduces into the participants' understanding, as well as into the events in which they participate, an element of uncertainty and unpredictability. This platform could, in political theory and practice, result in a retreat from false perfection, into the transformation of the illusory Enlightenment metaphor of perfect rationalism into the recognition of imperfection and fallibility. By understanding this fact, we can create an open society that in fact is not perfect, but guarantees freedom of thought, provides great scope for experimentation and creativity, and is open to never-ending improvements.

In principle, it can be stated that open society in its conceptual expression represents for both authors the principle of organizing society, based on the knowledge that the claims of the ultimate truth cannot be recognised. In view of our imperfect understanding and the impossibility of a definitive idea of what an open society is, it must always be redefined by the people who live in it and who consider faith in its principles as the fundamental organisational algorithm of its existence. People, able to correct their ideas of definitive solutions in the context of the biological and spiritual openness of the world, which implicitly contains a category of uncertainty - the search for a better world in terms freedom accessible to man.

The methodologically correct approach to constituting an open society should be based on the assumption that the real conditions may be very different from the expectations of their creators and the prevailing views (interests) of political or economic elites often do not correspond to the realistic conditions. The way to fulfil people's life goals could be in social engineering, a method of applying gradual corrections to the most acute social problems. Anyone who accepts this method may or may not have a society project in mind, may or may not hope that once mankind can accomplish an ideal state and achieve happiness or perfection on earth, because excellence is far removed and every generation of people is entitled not to be unhappy where it can be avoided. This can be achieved by a reasonable compromise,

objectivized in the institutions, taking into account the penetration of individual differentiated interests with circumstances, systemic pressures or ideological prejudices.

The **Popperesque** idea of gradual engineering is one of the most important anti-totalitarian ideas directed against the utopian demands of a holistic rebuilding of social life in closed societies. For example, as **B. Maggee**, a former Labour deputy and biographer of **Popper** writes in this regard, we must *"remember Popper's main motivation, especially for writing his work, "Open Society and Its Enemies I, II", which was in coping with the terrible atmosphere of Hitler's achievements and his destructive campaigning throughout Europe ... and in these circumstances, we may understand Popper's attempt to write this book primarily as a response to the universal penetration of totalitarian ideas into political practice in the most absurd, life and fundamental values of humanity denying form"* (Maggee: 1973, p. 87). Similarly, **R. B. Levinson** emphasizes that **Popper's** approach to analysing the conditions and mechanisms of designing an open society accentuates a situation where only citizens themselves can critically assess and evaluate the implications of government policy implementations. The divergence of views in such a type of society represents the driving force of progress in which various socio-political concepts are gradually falsified (by the method of critical discussion and often contradictory arguments), which forms the basis of an open society *"as a grouping of free individuals respecting to each other belonging set of their fundamental rights... Thus, it is not a utopian ideal, but an empirically feasible form of social coexistence, superior to all (realistic or potential) totalitarian alternatives ..."* (Levinson: 1957, p. 17).

In the above-suggested context, **Popper** has offered us his own social-political doctrine of criticism of the predecessors of totalitarianism and the prospect of developing a democratic post-war world. Since he perceived himself as a follower of the Enlightenment tradition, respect for freedom, human rights, tolerance and respect for individual dignity, he often drew attention to the dangers that accompany human experiments in attaining perfection with the prioritization of irrational methods. Especially in the context of the rebuilding of society determined by the idea of making an ideal State, he reminded the inevitable direction to a strong centralized government of several individuals, suppressing criticism and a belief in a single, unchanging ideal by persuading on the existence of definitive rational methods to determine this ideal and the means of implementing it. By not requiring the reconstruction of society as a

whole and confining ourselves to correcting relevant institutions, there will arise a potential prospect in relation to the possible correction of deficiencies in their functioning, while the central idea of achieving planned happiness will lose its validity.

This dimension of **Popper's** theoretical argument against utopian engineering was pointed out by **W. Slomski**. He considered the main motive of **Popper's** rejection of utopian socio-techniques to be a dramatic disturbance to the continuity of social life and the result of its implementation being (almost always) a violent detachment from tradition: "*When Popper talks about State management processes, his idea of the need to maintain connection with tradition becomes a fundamental postulate*" (Slomski: 2001, p. 134). Indeed, **Popper** preferred a sequence of social change as a productive practice precisely because of the diversity of traditions in which individuals implement their life projects. In his view, human existence is a constant social process of interaction, and the social essence of an individual not only involves being a member of a community, but also that his/her existence and development is only possible within and through that community (despite different value profiling). In a broader context, we consider just the moment of cooperation and solidarity between individuality and community as one of the main features of Popper's idea of an open society, deriving its legitimacy from citizens!

The influence of the ideas from the **Popper's** book "*Open Society and Its Enemies I, II*" on that the common feature of Nazi and Communist ideology is their claim to the ultimate, definitive truth, as well as the medium of personal experience with non-equilibrium life situations where normal rules do not apply, were included by **G. Soros** in creating his conceptual framework for open society. He meant, first, the determining experience of his own adolescence in the occupation of his native Hungary by Nazi Germany, and later the Soviet occupation, and finally "new" life in London, where he moved after all the war and post-war peripeties: "*Life in London was a disappointment. I had no money or friends ... I was a man who peeps in from behind a window, I discovered loneliness ... and when I once paid for food, I was left with no money. I found myself at the bottom, I told myself, and now I'm going to climb up. It will be a valuable experience*" (Soros: 2007, p. 48). And it was exactly that. He gradually became a student at the *London School of Economics*, a successful investor in financial markets, founder of an open society network of foundations worldwide, a statesman without a State, a guardian of public interest, personification of the American dream - simply a person who turned his worldview into a political and

economic agenda by means of which, as already indicated, he is implementing his intention to make the world a better place. Well, at this point we are slowly but surely getting to the intersection from which both teacher and his conscientious disciple will follow their own original ways of thinking ...

There are basically two reasons for that. We have already said that **Popper** and **Soros** understand science as a highly constructive way of acquiring knowledge, based on the postulate of imperfect understanding. **Soros** even considers **Popper's** assertions of asymmetry of verification and falsification as his greatest contribution to the methodology of science, eliminating the need for certainty. There is only one point of divergence, namely, the relationship between natural and social sciences, resulting from the postulate of imperfection: *"Overall, I agree with Popper's attitude, but I take it a step further. He says we can be wrong. I accept as a working hypothesis that we are naturally wrong. I call it the postulate of radical fallibility... I am breaking up with Popper at only one point. He claims the so-called doctrine of unity of the method, namely that the same methods and criteria apply to social sciences as to natural sciences. Let me have a different opinion. I believe that the human principle of uncertainty is an obstacle that is the exclusive property of social sciences; it slams a wedge between natural and social sciences"* (Soros: 2007, p. 50). The state of equilibrium, characteristic of the theory of rational expectations, lags in **Soros'** perception of reality because it does not take into account the deviation between reality and participatory perception of reality - that is, the existence of misconceptions as a causal factor in history! It is precisely the postulate of radical fallibility and the idea of fruitful mistakes that can be seen as a specific feature of **Soros'** definition of open society as an imperfect society that is open to improvement.

The second important difference concerns the transformation of theoretical parameters of an open society into a political intention (system). In order for such a system to work, there must be a criterion for assessing competing ideas (the majority principle) and there must be a general willingness to comply with this criterion (belief in democracy as a regulatory ideal). This (seemingly) suggests that both of them considered democracy as an attribute of an open society as the best form of political establishment (from among those that we have in reality have with all its shortcomings), as a method and an organizing principle for the competition of political ideas.<sup>3</sup> *"It is clear that the concept of*

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<sup>3</sup> Dichotomy between closed and open society has several semantic connotations with both **Popper**

*open society is closely related to the concept of democracy, but it is an epistemological, not a political concept ... The fact that an open society is an epistemological concept is also a source of strengths and weaknesses. Its main advantage is that it combines an open society with concepts of fallibility and reflexivity, thus providing a coherent view of the world without falling into the trap of dogmatic ideology. Its main weakness is that it ignores power relations that play a key role in shaping the events"* (Soros: 2007, p. 37). Thus, open society is not a simple idea. Even though it means freedom and absence of oppression, it sheds new light on the ideologies of fascism, nationalism, communism and imposing constraints through the rule of law, yet it is based on epistemological bases rather than on political theory! This is the main reason why **Soros** considers **Popper's** concept of open society to be not fully developed, *"because it is based only on a single, abstract and philosophical aspect of reality, and leaves other aspects like political power or historical context aside"* (Soros: 2007, p. 58).

One of the reasons for the lack of proper enshrining the concept of open society in political theory can be **Popper's** belief in a **"Churchill-like"** democracy as *"the State form of the least evil"* (Popper: 1995, p. 204). Democracy as a form of political establishment, according to him, represents a medium of functioning of open society, so democracy of open society can be understood as an institutional and spontaneously created social space where various social, ideological or economic forces are confronted. Its design parameters represent the presumption that there are different, legitimate claims of different entities in society. A well-functioning democracy and an open society is conditioned by the fundamental institutional equipment of the society, postulating a non-personalized system of government control by counterbalancing another power, combined with a quality staff policy. The creation of any institution involves important personal decisions, and the functioning of even the best institutions will always be largely dependent on the good and bad qualities of the people involved. In the light of a longer-term

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and **Soros**. One of the most representative characteristics of closed society is the distinction between thinking and reality, between description and fact, the traditional way of thinking, the only interpretation of reality, embodied by the ruling party-State dogma, the irrational commitment to habits, tradition, religion. They see an open society as a more complex and advanced form of social organisation, which means above all freedom, absence of oppression, self-critical view of the world, and an institutional framework for the rule of law and peace.

perspective, according to **Popper**, the issue of the nature and character of social and political institutions, which, in order to work efficiently, must be suitably constructed and occupied by suitable people, is a fundamental problem for us.

Popper also believed that in political theory and practice there is still a confusion and a fundamental misunderstanding of the fundamental dilemma of politics. The roots of this problem go back to the very foundations of democracy formation in ancient Greece, where **Plato** departed from a *very naive question*: "*Who is to rule the State? Who is to exercise government power? Should we replace the Platonic problem "who should rule?" for a completely different problem, namely: "Are there forms of government that need to be rejected for moral reasons?" And vice versa: "Are there such forms of government that allow us to get rid of reprehensible or just incompetent governments that cause damage?" I argue that these questions, in fact, lie in the foundations of our so-called democracies, without realizing it; they are completely different from Plato's question of whether the people should rule. And they are the foundation of both Athenian democracy and our modern Western democracies*" (Popper: 1997, pp. 185–186). The key criterion between an acceptable and unacceptable government is represented by the institutionalized possibility to the governed of getting rid of the bad government by the functioning of institutions that provide the means to control the remove their rulers from the office and deprive the government without spilling blood and at the same time constituting a "*first, fundamental moral principle for democracy*" as a form of State in which government can be overthrown without bloodshed (Popper: 1997, p. 204). The second type is tyranny - a government that cannot be rid of by other approaches than a successful revolution.

Nor does the etymological identification of democracy with the government of the people express the true state of affairs. The appointment, the creation of a government by an election act, can be interpreted as legitimation on behalf of the people and the will of the people, but the understanding of the term "people" cannot be based on any relevant empirical basis. Basically, the "government of the people" has never existed, it always meant the will of its most numerous, most active, most influential group. **Popper** even posed some concern that democracy may be considered a fraud in this context, because "*every member of the people, the nation knows that s/he does not rule*" (Popper: 1997, p. 204), but governments govern everywhere. A more prudent perception of the difference between the titular bearers of power and its true executives could

bring us closer to a position where we are able to judge a policy or government afterwards and express our consent or reject it. The election day should become *"not the day that legitimizes the new government, but the day we judge the old government"* (Popper: 1997, p. 205), because otherwise, by constantly emphasizing the opinion of the people's government, there is room for frustration and feeling of disappointment that nothing like that exists. Nowhere do the people rule, but governments do, or parties govern through their nominated representatives, and under the conditions of a political party pluralism, a parliament built on a proportional basis serves mainly to promote the influence of the parties and their propagandistic, manipulation skills!

Although **Popper** recognized the need for political parties to operate in a democratic political regime, he considered such a functioning in the sense of an intrinsically integrated logic of self-interest to be a threat to the very principle of democracy! As the bearer of the **Socratic** tradition, he considered the most important legacy of the present to be the desire for peace and freedom, as well as the readiness to bring sacrifices to both of these. This led him to say that *"despite everything, our times are the best of all the historically known, and the social form in which we live in the West is the best among all the historically known ones, despite many shortcomings"* (Popper: 1995, p. 200). Emphasizing the merits of the social form of the "West", he perceived as a result of the duel from which the victorious *"free democracies, the open societies of the West"* arose. *It was not those who had collapsed on the basis of their own colossal and permanently debated internal tensions ... to endure. These houses, these free societies, have endured; they were open societies. But the closed, sealed house, which was kept together by the iron chains, collapsed internally"* (Popper: 1997, p. 250). So neither the "cataclysm" of the two world wars nor the real danger of threatening the existence of humanity by the atomic (ecological) catastrophe discouraged him, because his concept of open society is moral, moral choice to accentuate individual decision to respect and protect his own freedom, security, but also freedom, the right and dignity of each other. Repeatedly, in Popper's understanding of open society, we emphasize rationality corresponding with morality!

In attempting to abstract from the infinitely complex conditionality of constructing the world order and the future of humanity, the question is how to reconcile a generally valid and acceptable humanitarian programme with forces that determine the political (ideological) agenda worldwide. Such a need is particularly urgent from the perspective of the development of the current

political-military integration efforts that can disrupt the turbulent and unstable development of financial markets. In the polemic, **G. Soros** suggested that there is much talk of global financial architecture, but by not experiencing political shocks comparable to the global financial crisis, there is practically no debate on global political architecture. The sovereignty of States on which political treaties are based is regarded by **Soros** as an anachronistic concept that is not sufficient to develop the collective values of humanity. It is precisely because most of the local conflicts arise from relations within the sovereign State (due to ethnic tensions, corruption, oppression, the fall of central authority), often melt under the protective coat of national sovereignty and when they eventually cross national borders, they grow into a real crisis. For this reason, the true state of international relations cannot be described as a political system that matches globalisation trends in the economy or culture. In **Soros'** words, the political and economic structure of the world is marked by a significant mismatch, resulting in asymmetry between the regulatory parameters of open society and democracy: *"Representative democracy is also a fundamental component of an open society; it is also a market economy. Representative democracy today rules in many countries, and Western democracies have confirmed that their political goal is to extend democracy to other parts of the world. The market economy has become truly global over the past decade, and its principles are spreading with truly missionary enthusiasm. So where is the mistake?"* (Soros: 2001, p. 144-145).

As always, a very prosaic answer is offered here, related to the consideration of the role of power and values in society: *"People tend to use their power to promote their own interests, not of common interest. One way of protecting the common interest is to insist on the division of power. This has become the cornerstone of the United States Constitution ... our founding fathers ... had been thoroughly aware of our imperfect understanding, but there is the Constitution was not built on these foundations ... American democracy precedes the concept of open society. The Constitution is the fruit of the Age of Reason; open society belongs to the age of fallibility"* (Soros: 2007, p. 37). In addition, the ideal of an open society as a social value to be pursued by a global society has gradually been unilaterally twisted by political decisions by market-based advocates of market fundamentalism that it will best serve the common interest if people follow their own interests without hindrance. The promotion of personal interest to a universal principle, involving not just the individual choices expressed in the markets, but also the social choice expressed in politics, is

considered by **Soros** to be a major obstacle to making people even aware of the idea of an open society, or even to perceive it as a goal that they should strive to attain in their lives!

Twisting the ideal of open society (not merely) by advocates of market fundamentalism shifts its underlying ethos to the seemingly utopian challenge of making it impossible and satisfying with the creation of an imperfect society, an open effort to improve. In fact, the reality of approaching equilibrium legitimizes an open society as a goal that seeks to seek and strive for it, albeit from the perspective of the second best, not quite perfect, option. With a certain amount of self-consciousness, **G. Soros** admits such confusion in the content fulfilment of his concept when he asks and responds to the thematic coordinates we follow: *"Is an open society an ideal, or is it a description of real conditions? Are Western democracies open society or they not? Are the United States, the European Union and many other parts of the world close to meeting the conditions of an open society? The answer is that open society is both an ideal and a description of reality, because an open society is a very unusual ideal: it is an imperfect society that is open to perfection. And Western democracies fulfil the conditions of open society in most questions except for one: They do not recognize an open society as a necessary goal"* (Soros: 2001, pp. 144-147). The key question of today's political theory is, according to **Soros**, the possibility of accepting an open society as a universal principle and its alignment with the principle of national sovereignty. No community can survive without social values, and if we recognize global society as a kind of community, it needs universal values to sustain it.

At the same time, the expansion, deepening and acceleration of cross-national relations in the form of globalisation also expands, according to **R. Dahl**, social, cultural, religious and economic ties at a transnational level, so that much more than in the past, the sovereignty of a nation-state is beginning to be fiction rather than reality. Despite the need to strengthen democracy and transparency in public flows, *"... transnational political structures and consciousness will probably remain weak in the foreseeable future. Only the European Community has many signs that it contains a gene for transnational growth ... and some transnational polyarchy could gradually emerge. Even if the population of its citizens were significantly more numerous than in the United States, the central government of the Community would not have to be further away from its citizens than the American national government would be from its own citizens"* (Dahl: 1989, p. 320).

So how to reconcile the idea of a global society, an integrated Europe, or a "world federation" with the sovereignty of States? Can any universal community be open to the importance of an open society analysed, based on the constant application of criticism and critical cooperation with civil society? We need a European civil society because of the transformation (Europeanisation) of a nation State that *"no longer fulfils its legitimizing role, because the fiscal base for its social policy has narrowed, the possibilities of macroeconomic regulation have been reduced and the influence of national forms of life is also gradually diminishing"* (Habermas: 2001, p. 80). To what extent can the barrier of the global markets and multinational corporations be built by building (globalizing) the civil sphere?

However, can we satisfactorily say what the concepts of European civil society and European identity mean and whether there is such a thing at all? As **M. Gbúrová** emphasizes, most often the concepts of citizen, citizenship, civil society are combined with civil identity, while *"from the functionalist point of view, the citizen reflects the aspect of individuality, the concept of citizenship expresses a civilized (especially public) way of incorporating individuals into the social whole. The term of civil society refers to the aspect of collectivism, but collectivism, sense of society as a developed structure of social institutions and organisations independent of the State as the primary power institution protecting its public through the principles of the rule of law and democratic control of the government. Thus, no society is, by nature, civil, as a result of cultural - civilisation development, the organisational gender principle of historically original societies gradually and asynchronously (because of different pre - citizens' initiation centres, local civilisation barriers, thought traditions of understanding these concepts), is replaced by the civic principle. So, from antiquity to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, the notion of civil society "has been synonymous with a political society that did not differ from the State. The tradition of modern conception of this concept was founded by John Locke, Adam Ferguson, but especially by Edmund Burke and Alexis de Tocqueville. All of the above-mentioned thinkers, but also other conservative and liberal theorists (J. J. Rousseau, I. Kant, Ch. L. de Secondant Montesquieu, A. Smith and others) have tried to define the term in terms of the concept of 'limiting and relativizing' (not the weakening) of the State ... The reductionist tradition of perceiving the civil society begins with Hegel, who was probably the first to use the notion of civil society in the modern sense of the word as a sphere between family and State. This tradition was developed by K. Marx, who reduced civil*

*society to the autonomous sphere of economic activities and relationships”* (Gbúrová: 2002, pp. 131-133).

Thus, when reflecting the semantic shades of the category of the civil society in the history of political thinking, we most often come across its identification with political society (merging of the private and public spheres of human existence), postulating into contraposition towards the State and State power (or its independent position) and ultimately overcoming the omnipotence of the State to civic subjectivity in political life, co-constituted by elements of institutional and ideological plurality. The departure from the synonymizing of civil and political society was based mainly on the interpretation of the transition from the absolutist - aristocratic to the industrial society based on the influence (interventions) of the economy on political (social) conditions. One of the most important thinkers who followed this line of thought was **G. W. Hegel**. As we have already pointed out, he perceived civil society as an autonomous sphere of private economic activities of individuals, which is the mediator of their particular activities and social generalities determined by the State.

One may say that **Hegel** clearly distinguishes between the civil society and the State. We understand the relationship between the two spheres in a reverse order, that is to say, in a different way than previously interpreted in political theories. Hegel demanded from society a high degree of efficiency and reciprocity in satisfying the individual needs and goals of individuals, which at the same time was to encourage trust in the existing institutions. Such a demand stems directly from **Hegel's** initial analysis of freedom. Because people act together to protect their freedom, the primary issue of modern political philosophy, according to **Hegel's** view, is not a priori what institutions are capable of fulfilling these functions, but rather, and to what extent, to regulate existing institutions for them to be able to fulfill those functions. That is why he noticed rationality in the context of the already existing institutions.

From the perspective of history, **Hegelian** civil society emerges only *"when a person has already fundamentally emancipated himself from all the preconditions of historically survived orders, from all the forms of serfdom and violence, and could make himself the purpose of his actions, satisfying his own self ..."* (Major, Sobotka: 1979, p. 85). It is precisely because of this form of coexistence that **Hegel** accepts the central idea of classical English political economics, the essence of which is to satisfy one's personal needs by the work of others and in his personal benefit with the benefit of the universal. He is convinced that in this form of cohabitation, the individual with the general,

coincidental with the inevitable, strives to find valid rules and patterns creating a sense and a sensible whole. As a priority, an individual is perceived as a representative of individual interests, with the possibility of possessing personal property.<sup>4</sup>

**K. Westphall** states that **Hegel** perceived civil society as a government without representatives, and also as an external State, because *"it cannot fulfill the requirement of political autonomy and because State institutions in civil society - the implementation of law, the legal system and public authority - are seen as exclusive means to attaining personal needs and goals. Civil society members are bourgeois, but not citizens, until they have to comply with binding laws without understanding them, as well as without public and official explanations of their role in the applicable law structure. Although the public authority and the valid legal system operate and act in their interest, they are not under their control. Thus, the political aspect of autonomy is unattainable within civil society. Achieving political autonomy and thus citizenship is the primary function of Hegel's understanding of government"* (Westphall: 1993, p. 259). In this way, civil society becomes a field of competition, in a sense anarchy of private free interests, when uncontrollable movement of material and spiritual elements or egoistic promotion of individualism can occur. Civil society is *"the difference between family and State, although its formation is developing later than the formation of the State; for as a difference it presupposes a State which must precede it as something independent in order to exist"* (Hegel: 1992, p. 219 - Amendment to § 182). True, its creation can only be considered in connection with the existence of a modern State. A rational element of civil society is a universal system of mutual work and satisfaction of subjective needs for **Hegel**. In relation to a particular activity, this means that everyone works as a priority for themselves, but the results of the activity co-create a common wealth for which *all of the others* stand. *"In law, the subject matter is the person, in the moral opinion it is the subject, in the family it is a member of the family, in civil society it is a citizen as such (like bourgeois) - here in the needs of opinion it is a specific idea called man; that is, here and there, in fact only here, there is only a talk about man in this sense"* (Hegel: 1992, p. 227 - note on § 190).

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<sup>4</sup> Hegel also writes of ownership (Gesamtheit) in terms of defending the way people live, their moral values and goods. He does not mean exclusively private property. For more details see CHOTAŠ, J.: *Hegelova teorie mravního státu*. In: *Filosofický časopis*, 51, 2003, No. 2, p. 281.

In fact, for **Hegel**, *"the State as such is the first one within which the family develops into civil society, and it is the idea of the State itself that divides itself into these two moments; in the development of civil society, the moral substance acquires its infinite form, which contains both moments: 1. the moment of infinite resolution to self-implementation - existing self-awareness; 2. the moment of the form of generality that is in education, the forms of thought through which the spirit is in laws and institutions, in its intended will, objective and real as organic totalitarianism."* (Hegel: 1992, p. 273 - note on § 256). Therefore, it is possible to believe that the State is the true reality for **Hegel**, the true social reality that, as the first and most important instance, creates civil society and is not the result of a gradual shift away from this category.

The dilemma we repeatedly suggest is the theoretical foundation of ideological asymmetries, culminated in the moral legitimacy of organizing the political (social) order on economic principles, and of perceiving the category of civil society as an unrestricted market, involving all the people and thus allowing the people to cross the borders among nations. Coming back to the proclaimed legacy of **Popper**, he answered a straight question of defining the idea of Europe as the idea of an open society in the sense of impossibility to define something like that because Europe has the very opposite of self-criticism as the basis of a truly sane society in which no one goes and speaks: I know the only true ideal, I defined it ... Later, he took sides with an integrated Europe (*"I am of course for the European Union"*) and **G. Soros** expressed the same optimistic attitude towards the relationship between open society and integration: *"I suggest that the democratic States of the world have become members of an alliance that aims to create a global open society... I believe that the idea of an open society will provide some principles for managing international relations, for this, however, it is necessary to transform the abstract idea into an operative idea"* (Soros: 2001, p. 330–331). The practical political agenda of creating a global society is by no means a global government, but a *"government of international law ..."* (Soros: 2007, p. 14-15). Other principles that create an open society include regular, free and fair elections, the constitutional protection of minorities, the pursuit of peaceful conflict resolution, private ownership, and a sense of social responsibility and justice.

The market economy, despite its global presence, does not create a global community and social values do not find expression in the markets. Markets track and reflect the interests of individual market participants, social values are the result of perception and interests of the members of society, so in this game

there is a distinction between rule-making and rules-based play. Paradoxically, in this context, according to **Soros**, the fact that direct comparison of democratic politics and the market process points to worse functioning politics than that of the market! To be clear, **Soros** advocates separating the role of market participants from policy participants, as they are two distinct roles that "need to be judged by different criteria: market decisions by individual consequences, political participation by societal implications" (Soros: 2001, p. 179). Although the market mechanism and representative democracy cannot meet the expectations that citizens place in them, this does not mean that we should reject them. In the spirit of fundamental parameters of open society, political processes and market mechanisms represent something that needs to be improved, made better, not abolished! And here **Soros**, in his interpretation, speaks in a fundamental way (in the spirit of following his Enlightenment ideals?) for what he called his ideal teacher as political idealism: "*The political process undermines the predominance of a profitable motive over civil virtue ... The global capitalist system is based on competition and competition is so great that even the most successful ones have to fight for survival ... if we allow the profit motive to dominate the political scene, society will lose any moral foundation. Society can also exist without a moral foundation, but it cannot be called an open society*" (Soros: 2001, p. 183).

Uncritical confidence in the profit motive and competition, which pushes today's political elites to make budget decisions, has raised the profit motive to a moral principle with very serious consequences. According to **Soros**, from the perspective of the present moment in history, the leadership role falls to America as an imperial power and at the same time a force that has an obligation to show interest in the welfare of the world as a whole. The nature of American society and policy can be defined with a very paradoxical phenomenon of postmodern reality in the Western world: excessive admiration for success, no matter how it was achieved, measured by monetary terms at the expense of more real values, creates unstable foundations of society! Moreover, the general public is not interested in arguments of an intellectual or scientific nature, interested in the results that would be in line with their expectations. The ideas of representative democracy and market economy, which originate in the Enlightenment, are confronted with a political reality that does not establish a voter - representative bond (and vice versa) on the defence of certain values regardless of re-election. According to **Soros**, the essence of (not just) American democracy, reflecting the division of power, has little to do with the

basic postulate of the open society theory - knowing that the ultimate truth lies beyond our reach: *"The concept of open society is misunderstood ..., America is an open society not understanding the concept of open society and not even recognizing its principles"* (Soros: 2007, pp. 94–95). Ultimately, he does not consider the concept of open society to be part of American political tradition anyway...

Of course, this has very serious and unfavourable consequences, because instead of wanting our elected leaders to be telling us the truth, we want them to *"provide us with self-satisfaction"* (Soros: 2007, p. 95). In fact, we have a situation where the political and economic elites in liberal democracy regimes consciously and with the consent of the voters no longer care about satisfying the latter's real needs, but about the desires that they at the same time manipulate and incite! The nature of politics has changed due to the methods used for commercial purposes, the compact on cherishing the truth, sense of honesty and integrity, has been "corrupted" in particular by the growing consumerism of life and the fact that *"politicians have learned to meet the voters' desires rather than implementing the policy they had believed in"* (Soros: 2007, pp. 99-100). Therefore, according to **Soros**, a society that constitutes a precarious system where voters elect a candidate who is telling them what they want to hear and at the same time cannot avoid seeing being manipulated, cannot only be called a transactional, failing to understand a concept, but also one being self-satisfied: *"This is how America has become a self-satisfied society ... Americans have many reasons to be satisfied. The democratic capitalism as applied in the United States has been very successful... The United States has become the only superpower to become the main sponsor of globalisation, which in turn has become a benefaction"* (Soros: 2007, 100). But domination, no matter how productive and desirable, will, nevertheless, never last for long, and self-satisfaction would eventually lead the society unwilling to confront unpleasant facts to the position of fictitious misinterpretation of reality, the very opposite of misguided sense of the logic of life contexts!

**F. Zakaria** is still another author who in his book *"The Future of Freedom"* writes that there is something wrong with American democracy. He considers democracy to be a very fragile work that is still being developed in America and elsewhere in the world, but despite the evident prosperity and progress in Western history, the tension between democracy and liberalism is still being evident and growing. This trend may be particularly noticeable in the US, where most Americans have lost their faith in the balance between the will of the

majority and the rights of the minority, or even between freedom and democracy. Therefore, the blear-eyed populism, which values popularity and openness as a fundamental measure of legitimacy, is increasingly becoming accepted the result of which is a profound imbalance in the American system in the form of *"more democracy but less freedom"*.<sup>5</sup>

The introduction of truth and other social values by a competitive process operating in the economic field, according to **Soros**, causes the disintegration of the global capitalist system, which is a distorted type of open society. However, the present in the context of history is nothing exceptional from this point of view, unpleasant sources of instability represent just other outbreaks in the continuity of boom and decline. The path of transition from a closed society to an open one, one of the most profound revolutions ever made by mankind, is greatly complicated by the destructive capacity of human nature, technological progress, international financial system instability, and policy failures at both national and international levels, but consciousness still remains our advantage in that reality is not being that far from the desired goal - to create and seek a better world, to learn how to do things as best we can, to seek and eliminate our own mistakes, to find a balance between the nature of our goals and the realistic nature of their implementation.

## Some Words by Way of Conclusion

It is an adventure of life that is undertaking the venture of getting into new and strange circumstances and is seeking them out. According to **Popper**, our modern "open" societies are already fulfilling these parameters in many respects because, as a result of losing their organic nature, *"an open society is gradually becoming what I would like to call an abstract society ... Imagine a society in which people practically never meet each other, in which all matters are being handled by isolated individuals who communicate by their machine-written letters or telegrams and who move around in their closed cars. (Artificial insemination would even allow reproduction without personal presence.) Such a society could be called a totally abstract or depersonalized society"* (Popper: 1994, p. 158-159).

In a similar vein, **G. Soros**, who considers an open society (among other things) to be a theoretical model of a (not) perfectly changeable society, concludes its analysis as follows: *"The alternatives would be available in all the*

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<sup>5</sup> For details see: Zakaria, F.: *Budúcnosť slobody. Neliberálna demokracia v USA a zahraničí*. Bratislava: 2010.

*areas of being: in personal relationships, opinions and thoughts, production processes, and raw materials, social and economic organisation, and so on. In these circumstances, an individual would enjoy the most prominent position... Perhaps the most striking characteristic of a perfectly changeable society is the decline of personal relationships ... The image that emerges to us is not very joyful. An open society can prove to be much less desirable than a thing that is seen as an ideal by some people. To put things right, it must be borne in mind that every system becomes absurd and unbearable when it comes to its logical conclusion, be it More's Utopia, Defoe's imaginary countries, Huxley's Brave New World, or Orwell's 1984" (Soros: 1996, pp. 242-244).*

Theoretically, we arrive at the culmination of the observed storyline, where the solution of the relationship between closed and open society, between closed and open way of thinking, creates space for the cardinal paradox: If traditional communities are built on the principle of exclusion, and an open society wants to recruit new members on a global basis is it possible to fill an open (free, democratic) society with positive content or must it always stand against something? The answer is not easy, we could once again say it is open-ended. According to **Soros**, in building a global open society, we should rely on the efforts and convictions of people who adhere to its principles, who at the same time consider such type of society to be an appropriate form of social order. And he comes to an even more paradoxical conclusion than **Popper** - the ideal of an open society is so much general that in fulfilling its content it is not effective to proceed in a positive line, but in a negative one, that is, an open society can be as a matter of priority be built on the exclusion of others ("*an open society needs enemies*").

A ponderous paradox, a blissful illusion, or a degenerate product of human desire for a better world (matrix)? Interactive technologies, able to conjure up the virtual reality of wealth, perfection and freedom, transform ancient human dreams into a daily, simulated existence. Fantomat, a machine for creating virtual reality, a work written in 1964 by Polish writer **Stanislaw Lem**, has been offering us a virtual reality around us for a long time, in which consumers can escape into a simulated environment of their choice. The mystical stone of the sages, for centuries-long nourished vision of a perfect material and spiritual world, is reflected to some extent in the concept of an abstract open society, in our view of the elitist image of the life of realistic social groups made up of human forgery, the life of man who in pursuit of making his/her dream come true would probably desert him/herself...

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